

S P H I N X F I N E A R T



Philip Andreyevich Maliavin (Kazanki, Samara province 1869 - Nice, France 1940)

Head and Torso of a Woman in a Kerchief

signed 'PhMaliavian' (centre right)

pencil and black chalk, with touches of red and blue chalk, on paper

44.4 x 32 cm (17½ x 12⅝ in)

Head and Torso of a Woman in a Kerchief is an excellent example of the peasant drawings which Philip Andreyevich Maliavin returned to throughout his career. A middle-aged woman stares just past the viewer's shoulder, her head slightly tilted, seemingly lost in thought. Her expression is intriguing and engaging as the viewer wonders what is on her mind. Around her head she has wrapped a kerchief, which is coloured by small spots of red and blue, and she wears a simple, coarse blouse. Maliavin has made this quick drawing with light pencil and chalk marks, modelling the woman's features in soft tones. The rapid chalk marks endow the drawing with a very real sense of spontaneity and it is clear from the position of the woman on the page that Maliavin originally intended to make a full-length portrait, before deciding that the head and torso was a more immediate and effective composition. The drawing is an excellent example of how, with relatively few marks, Maliavin was able to create a portrait of great psychological depth.

Maliavin's *Pensive Peasant Woman* (Private Collection) is very similar to the present work both in subject matter and style. Although the woman is more overtly lost in thought in *Pensive Peasant*

Woman, both works reflect Maliavin's desire to capture his subject's mood, and his fondness for drawing and painting simple rural Russians. The faces in both works are depicted with the softest of marks, whereas the clothing is expressed using slightly sharper lines. [Ryazan Woman](#), is also comparable and illustrates what Alexandre Benois (1870-1960) called Maliavin's 'Bacchic feast of colour'.¹

Maliavin's talent as a draughtsman was evident from an early age and the villagers he lived amongst funded his artistic education in a monastery famous for its icon painting. He managed to obtain a scholarship to the Imperial Academy in St. Petersburg where he studied under, and was hugely influenced by [Ilya Yefimovich Repin](#). In the years preceding the Russian revolution, Maliavin became one of the country's most renowned artists, with work that celebrated his humble origins through expressive line and exuberant colour. Although, as he was born a peasant but had an international reputation as a painter, he was in many ways the ideal prototype for the new Soviet artist, he left Russia in 1922 never to return. However, his work continued to reveal a profound nostalgia for the traditional rustic life of the Russian peasant. To quote Benois once more, his depictions of Russian peasant women 'mock all the canons of pulchritude and have yet a peculiar beauty'.² The present work is an excellent example of this summary realised.

¹ Benois, A., *The Russian School of Painting*, trans. Yarmolinsky, A., (A.A. Knopf, New York, 1916), p.185.

² *ibid.*, p.186.

Provenance:

Studio of the Artist;
Zoia Bounatian, daughter of the artist;
purchased from the above by the father of the previous owner.

Artist description:

Philip Andreyevich Maliavin was born in 1869 in a large village of Kazanki (Samara Province, now the Totsk District, Orenburg Region). Hardly any of the peasants could read and write. Philip's artistic nature manifested itself at an early age. Traveling monks used to bring with them icons from Mount Athos, which made a great impression on the boy. Philip dreamed of going to Athos to learn icon painting, but his parents were against this, claiming that learning was not for peasants. He insisted, and finally managed to get their unwilling consent. At the age of sixteen he set out for Greece in the company of a monk from Athos, who has been to Kazanki on a visit. The money for the road was collected for him by the villagers.

The monasteries of Mount Athos were famous for their rich collections of Greek manuscripts and printed books. To Maliavin's disappointment, icon painting as an art was not practiced there; only copies were made from models arriving from Russia. Philip entered the monastery as a novice and was made responsible for painting murals and icons, with nothing but his own efforts to teach him the secrets of the craft.

Very little of his early work has survived. He showed great talent and aimed essentially at an accurate rendition of nature. He then met Vladimir Beklemishev, sculptor and professor at the Petersburg Academy of Arts, who visited Mount Athos in 1891 and was deeply impressed by the works of the young self-taught painter.

In March 1892 Maliavin went to St. Petersburg for professional training. With the support of Beklemishev he was admitted to the Academy and enrolled as a private student. The studios were headed by such great artists as Ilya Repin, Vladimir Makovsky and Arkhip Kuinji. Maliavin applied for a place in Repin's studio, who was the teacher of painters such as Igor Grabar, Konstantin Somov, Anna Ostroumova-Lebedeva, Boris Kustodiev, Isaac Brodsky, and Dmitry Kardovsky. It was whilst in Repin's studio that Maliavin created the best of his early paintings. *Peasant girl knitting a stocking* is a work of this period, a large-scale study with a great deal of air and sunlight. This work is the first of Maliavin's canvases in which red, his favorite colour, sounds its triumphant note. Three early works painted by

Maliavin (the other two – also images of peasant women) were displayed at Moscow Art Lovers' Society Salon, and were bought by Pavel Tretyakov for his Gallery.

Another series of works created during Maliavin's early period were portraits of his fellow students from Repin's studio. Amongst these was his well-known portrait of Konstantin Somov, a future founding member of the "World of Art" group.

Only four years had passed since the novice from Mount Athos has arrived to St. Petersburg, and he was participating in the Metropolitan exhibitions, his paintings bought by Pavel Tretyakov for his celebrated gallery, and his name all over the newspapers and magazines. This made Maliavin greatly sought after by rich patrons wishing to have their portraits painted, such as Mme. Popova and the Baroness Wolf.

The years 1895 to 1899 were a period of especially intense productivity. Maliavin's painting style was unconventional – too bright and riotous for contemporary taste. In 1897 Maliavin received the status of Artist, but it was granted him after much debate, and not for his competition painting but for some of his portraits, which were also on display. In 1900 he went to Paris, where the French newspapers call him "a credit to Russian painting" and he was awarded a gold medal. The Museo d'arte moderno in Venice acquired his work *Laughter*: the painting was perceived as a symbol of the new art.

On his return to Russia, Maliavin married Natalie Novaak-Sarich, a private student at the Higher Art School and daughter of a rich Odessa industrialist, and the young couple settled in a village near Riazan. His works appeared in the Salons of the World of Art group and the Union of Russian Artists (AKhR). His paintings with generalized titles like *The peasant girl* or *The peasant woman* were portraits of specific individuals. The paintings' charm lies in their use of colour and epic scale. Colour fills the paintings and creates a dynamic effect of upward movement.

From 1905 to 1907, during Russia's revolution crisis, Maliavin was immersed in his "peasant" canvasses. In 1906 he created *The whirlwind*, considered his greatest painting. The Assembly of the Academy of Arts accords him the rank of Academician "in consideration of his fame in the field of art".

From 1908 to 1910 no work of his appeared at exhibitions. The attacks of official art critics on Maliavin's work were becoming more and more frequent. Maliavin went abroad for a long stay in Paris. After his return to Russia, he painted a large family portrait, which was displayed in 1911 at the Union of Russian Artists (AKhR) Salon, but the canvas shocked and disappointed viewers. In 1911 to 1915 Maliavin only displayed drawings and canvases of the previous period. The Revolution of 1917 brought change in every sphere of the economical, political, social and cultural life of the country.

In 1918 he and his family moved to Riazan. The painter took an active part in the propaganda of art under the auspices of the Riazan Commissariat for Education.

In 1920 Maliavin went to Moscow and plunged into the capital's artistic life. He was admitted to Kremlin, where he made drawings for the portrait of Lenin, and painted a portrait of Anatoly Lunacharsky. Maliavin's works were displayed at Moscow exhibitions. In the autumn of 1922 Maliavin went abroad with his family to organize a personal traveling exhibition of his work. His family settled in Paris. He painted portraits upon commission and his works were displayed at Parisian exhibitions (1924). In 1933 he toured Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, England and Sweden with exhibitions of his works. In 1935 and 1937 he held solo exhibitions in London, Stockholm and Nice.

Philip Maliavin died in Nice on 23 December 1940.

Collections

Maliavin's work is represented in the following collections: Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow; National Gallery of Armenia, Yerevan; amongst others.